

On April 4th, 5th, 6th of this year, a delegation of OFFE volunteers traveled to Washington, DC to lobby support for the protection of veteran's benefits in civil court. During their 3 day mission the OFFE team set up shop in the Rayburn and Cannon House buildings and spoke with anyone interested in their issues. A number of scheduled meetings were attended by members from both Houses, to include a sit-down meeting with Florida Congressman, Allen West.

Congressman West was briefed by the OFFE team about the lack of protection veteran's benefits in state courts. West heard firsthand accounts of civil court abuses of veteran's rights and due process of law. Congressman West sat quietly and watched a video produced by OFFE describing violations of veterans' benefits federal protection. After some 40 minutes, Congressman stood up and said, "I get it."

Well, apparently, Congressman West did "get it" and in late April, Congressman West wrote a letter to the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Jeff Miller. West requested the committee investigate allegations made by OFFE that veteran's disability benefits were being misused as 'income' and awarded to ineligible third parties by means of court ordered alimony and support payments.

As a result of West's letter, 2 weeks ago the Congressman met with Executive Staff Members for the House Committee of Veterans Affairs. According to Jonathan Blyth, Executive Staff Member for Congressman West, the Congressman voiced his concerns for the way state courts are treating veteran's disability compensation during a divorce hearing. West suggested that such mistreatment of veteran's benefits may be in violation of USC, Title 38, Section 5301.

Shortly after this preliminary meeting, OFFE researcher William Heino received a handwritten note from Congressman West. In the note, West stated that the meeting was productive, but follow-up action was essential.

To date, Congressman Allen West has received a large number of phone calls, facsimiles, emails, and letters in support of his efforts to protect the benefits earned by our men and women in uniform. In addition, Congressman West has received a number of military medals from disabled veterans in protest for the mistreatment of veteran's benefits by state divorce courts nationwide.

According to OFFE Chairman, Gene Simes, Congressman West is not going to turn the medals back to the Congress as requested by the veterans. To do so would officially remove the awards and declarations from the veteran's military records and DD214. Congressman West does not want to do that. I think he would rather personally return the awards to the veterans once this issue is resolved. Instead a special place for the received medals has been established in the Congressman's DC office together with all letters.

Simes and the OFFE team are cautiously optimistic about Congressman West's efforts and support. The OFFE team has been here before.

Operation Firing For Effect is the only veteran's service organization in the country aggressively addressing the 5301 problem. OFFE volunteers have made 7 trips to Washington, DC lobbying for enforcement of USC, Title 38, Section 5301. OFFE is currently monitoring 150 cases of 5301 abuse, and to date, 9 members of OFFE's 'AREA 5301' have been jailed for refusing to give up their veteran's disability compensation to a third party. OFFE has 10 years of experience and research time invested in the 5301 issue. In an effort to shoulder the number of calls Congressman's West's office receive concerning the 5301 issue, it is strongly recommended you contact OFFE first. This will help reduce the phone traffic West's small Florida District office is receiving. OFFE is working closely with Congressman West on this issue and we will share all correspondence with the Congressman.

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